

September 21, 2002 – Town Hall Meeting
Held at Kentucky School for the Deaf – Danville, Kentucky

Kevin Martin, President of Kentucky Association of the Deaf (KAD) opened the meeting and introduced today's participants from the Kentucky Commission on the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (KCDHH), Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and the Kentucky School for the Deaf (KSD). This meeting was intended to be an information sharing session and an opportunity for teachers, parents and concerned citizens that work with deaf and hard of hearing students to discuss upcoming changes in the school system. Approximately 90 - 100 individuals were in attendance.

Highlights from the meeting include:

Discussion of the American Institutes for Research (AIR) report – Federal guidelines requiring schools to improve their curriculum to stay consistent with the nation wide movement to raise the bar of education for children. The KDE has made a commitment to ensure that deaf and hard of hearing children score equivalent to hearing children on the CATS test by 2014.

Bill Stearns, from KDE, discussed the AIR recommendations point-by-point, and the background for the report, as outlined in the Kentucky Advocate spring edition.

1. *Early identification and intervention.* This is the foundation for services across the state for this population. No strong coherent system exists for identification, which depends on geographic location. Agencies involved in this process are not communicating well and programs providing services are not comprehensive in communicating with the public school systems. There is also a shortage of professionals trained to meet the needs of this population.
2. *Commitment to strengthen family involvement.* Parental education and counseling throughout the child's education is mandatory. The current delivery system is not family oriented and parents are not fully aware of the services available for their children.
3. *To enhance early intervention, alternatives must be available where the child resides.* Through collaborative structures and efforts of all involved, regional programs must be developed for deaf and hard of hearing children. Appropriate transportation services must be identified and strengthened. Financial resources must be addressed that follow the child wherever they receive services.
4. *Roles of KSD and the Kentucky School for the Blind (KSB) need to be identified and clearly defined.* Students identified must have their progress tracked effectively to ensure quality of services. Current databases do not

accurately reflect this population nor track them through transition to adult life. A more elaborate evaluation system must be developed.

5. *Schools must develop a clear philosophy of purpose and services needed.* In comparison to other states Kentucky ranks relatively high in the number of students with disabilities placed in residential schools. There are no clear guidelines regarding placement of students in residential settings, but rather it is a parental decision. More work experience and independent living skills need to be taught in these settings so students can transfer these skills when they return to their home communities.
6. *KSD and KSB must evaluate the needs of students entering the curriculum and carefully address those needs.* Professionals serving these students must be qualified to teach the necessary skills.
7. *More needs to be done to train professionals serving the deaf, hard of hearing and blind population of students.* Efforts to retain qualified professionals must be stepped up to ensure there are sufficient numbers of trained professionals to serve the entire geographical area of the state.
8. *Increased and redirected investments in technology and vocational education are mandatory.* Deaf, hard of hearing and visually impaired students must be held to the same standards as all other students statewide. Programs must be improved to train students in advancements in technology, although such programs cost six times as much for disabled students as those who are not disabled. Funding provisions do not encompass this need. Vocational programs need to better prepare the student for adult living.
9. *Hold the deaf, hard of hearing and visually impaired student population to the same standards all students must meet.* Additional learning needs are often identified in this population, requiring additional time spent on academic learning. This may mean providing students with additional years of instruction to master such skills.
10. *KDE must appoint a Director to oversee services for this population.* This would mean a liaison would be appointed to report to the Commissioner of KDE regarding services at KSD and KSB. Barb Kibler will expand on the development and roles of this team later.
11. *Adequate funding must be provided to ensure a high level of services is maintained.* Funding must be increased or rechanneled to meet these needs.
12. *Physical plant of both KSD and KSB needs to be changed.* Both campuses have excess capacity. KSD has some residential facilities that are not suitable for young children.

Barb Kibler discussed the collaborative team that has been formed to ensure deaf/hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired students are being served through the KDE. She was charged with directing the team and members include: Wilton McMillan, previously from

KSD, Kenny Jones, previously with KSB and Bill Stearns. Each team member has a specific area of focus. The team has reviewed the AIR report and recommendations and is working to implement the recommendations. However, the Board of Education makes the ultimate decisions regarding the recommendations. Although some steps have been taken toward improvement, not all recommendations have been addressed. During the October board meeting a plan of action for addressing all the recommendations will be developed. The AIR report addresses all students throughout all school districts, and those that are home schooled, not just students in residential facilities. This allows for a broad focus for all students involved. We will need the support of others within KDE, staff throughout the districts, parents and other agencies to implement the recommendations fully. For example, early identification is dependent on the child's involvement in the *First Steps program*. Therefore we must promote better communication and cooperation with that agency to identify students in these disability groups.

Another agency we must work closely with is the *Governor's Early Childhood Initiative*. That agency looks at a broad range of issues including education, medical and whatever it takes to ensure young children are ready for school and have a greater chance for success in school. Many students have been misdiagnosed and are not receiving appropriate services.

Wilton McMillan discussed his transition to Frankfort and what wonderful attitude co-workers at KDE have toward his involvement. He has been researching videoconferencing and hopes to attend a videoconferencing seminar in October at Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C. to obtain first hand information on technology available to the deaf and hard of hearing as well as the blind and visually impaired population. He also attended a Mental Health Advisory Board meeting in hopes of establishing a partnership and discussed mental health related issues of deaf and hard of hearing children. He emphasized the importance of all agencies working together on such projects as expanding regional programming and other educational issues. Wilton visited the Lexington Speech and Hearing Center and the Louisville Deaf Oral School to establish a collaborative relationship with agencies that serve this population and work together to be more effective with services. Videoconferencing seems to be the most efficient way to reach the rural areas of the state, but more research needs to be completed regarding a state wide educational resource center on blindness and a state wide educational resource center on deafness. Too many deaf and hard of hearing children are being misdiagnosed as Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) when in fact many are really suffering from communication barriers that increase their frustration in school and reduce their ability to learn.

Wilton met with Fran Hardin, Principal of KSD, and discussed how student life can be integrated with academics so that learning can be reinforced 24 hours/day. A blueprint needs to be developed for this since statistics prove that 92% of a child's education occurs outside the classroom.

Vivian Link summarized changes made at KSD recently to align with the AIR report recommendations, and how KSD is moving toward implementing those recommendations:

Expansion of the early intervention program;

Review of regional programs in effect and how they can be expanded to build stronger collaborations with local school districts;

Meet the challenge of providing expertise and educating professionals at the local level so they will gain the knowledge necessary to serve students in their area;

Providing strong leadership in the Regional programs, such as Andy Hensley (Western), Artie Grassman (Western) and Sue Spankenberger (Northern) are doing currently in their areas. An additional position is open in the Eastern portion of the state but is yet unfilled;

Formation of “teams” at the school, to give 24-hour support, and allowing the dormitory staff and teachers to work together on the educational process.

Congressman Ernie Fletcher was recognized for his support of the educational changes. His representative, Carolyn Ammerman, who has a deaf daughter that graduated from KSD, is here on his behalf.

QUESTION and ANSWER session:

A KSD alumnus asked that students be allowed to work with Village Apartments to gain skills in construction. KDE responded that such resources are being explored to expand the vocational education programs.

A KSD teacher/parent asked that job opportunities for trained students be explored in the rural areas of the state so students can go home without having to depend on Social Security for income. Vivian Link responded that this is a major concern and the transition to adult life depends on the availability of jobs in the area. A structure is being formed to provide transition assistance in this area and will continue to be a major focus of the department. Job skills must be provided not only job training, so the skills can be transferred to another available job if necessary. Today’s job market demands this skill, as today’s high school graduates will change careers eight times during their life, according to statistics. We also have to work more with employers, and the Economic Development Cabinet, to educate employers and make them comfortable with hiring deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

A *KSD alumnus* asked if students sent to Regional programs would receive the same socialization and interaction with other deaf and hard of hearing students that those in residential schools receive? Vivian Link responded that regional programs would need to evolve to meet the needs of these students. Parents are the deciding factor on where the child receives their education and the school system must do what is necessary to support that. Regional coordinators are developing ways to ensure students receive the socialization needed. Summer programs at KSD also support this goal and cutting edge technology, such as videoconferencing allows students to socialize and interact without actually being in the same location. Tutorial services may also be provided through videoconferencing so teachers can be utilized efficiently. Early Intervention is imperative to give young children a communication base so they will have the tools to participate in Regional programs.

A *KSD teacher's* concerns lie with having sufficient funds to provide vocational services for students, allowing them to make the transition to adult life. Vivian Link responded that this year's focus was on childhood intervention and getting the Regional programs up and running. A statewide study needs to be compiled to see what jobs/careers are out there and how they can be addressed. If the focus is on KSD students only, current funding cannot support the programs. Some discussion has occurred about setting up a Regional technical center at KSD, which would serve students throughout the area, including hearing students. This recommendation is the number one priority to move forward with if additional funds can be allocated.

A *KSD staff person* asked that KDE ensure that transitional students, those who traditionally do not go to college, do not "fall through the cracks" but rather are provided with vocational/occupational training to ensure their success in adult life. Mr. Stearns responded that he feels confident that the KDE service delivery model will ensure that career and technical education is not neglected in favor of academics for any child.

A *parent* asked that the after school programs in the dorms, such as computer labs, be reinstated for all students without an additional fee being charged. Her family moved to Danville to ensure her son would be able to embrace Deaf culture and still have his family nearby for support. After school activities that cost additional money prohibit some families from participating. Vivian Link responded that the change in after school programs is being reviewed and evaluated. They are aware of the parental concerns, especially regarding the fees and will compare their original intentions with the outcomes that have been analyzed in the last month and provide more feedback in the near future.

A *KSD student* asked if Kerr Hall would be renovated so students can move back into that historic building for classes? Vivian Link responded that funds have been requested for that project but are currently caught in the controversy with finalizing the state budget in Frankfort. Until the Legislature approves a final budget this question cannot be answered.

A *KSD alumnus* stated that he graduated from KSD and obtained employment in the community. However, recent changes in the workforce such as use of headsets to provide instructions to employees are causing deaf employees to be left out. Mr. Stearns responded that it is the responsibility of everyone in the community to ensure that such discrimination does not happen, and KDE is working to ensure that technological advances that will level the playing field for individuals are included in school curriculums.

A *retired KSD teacher* asked if Jacobs Hall would be sold? The deaf community has strong emotional ties to that building and it is a link to Deaf culture and the history of the community. It also houses the museum and exemplifies deaf education throughout history. Bill Stearns and Vivian Link responded that this has NOT been a topic of discussion in any meetings to date. Facilities are being reviewed and the Finance Cabinet has involvement in how the buildings on campus are utilized, but they are sensitive to the significance of Jacobs Hall. The State Board of Education is very aware of the importance it holds and will show the same degree of respect to its history as they have shown for Deaf culture throughout the past two hundred years.

An *audiologist* asked if the Kentucky Early Years program was in danger of being disbanded? KDE responded that the intent is to make such programs stronger, not disband those already in place. KDE is working with all such programs, including those run by agencies outside state programs, to ensure that all student needs are covered and available throughout the state. Ms. Link indicated that at the Federal level there has been some shift in focus, and they may be the final say on which programs are impacted due to funding allocations. Ms. Jones also asked how audiologists fit into the concept of regional programs? KDE responded that all students must have access to quality programs such as audiologists. Such needs will be built into the regional programming and both comprehensive and quality services will be assured. Although each regional center may not have an audiologist on staff, students will be provided access to such services, which may mean more staff would be needed.

A *parent, alumna and KSD staff person* asked if the new requirements for certification of interpreters would mean that less qualified interpreters would be used in “teams” to provide services? Vivian Link responded that they are aware that although the number of qualified interpreters has grown in Kentucky there still are

not enough to serve all the school districts throughout the state. However, she is confident that KDE will not allow schools to “get by” with providing inadequate services to any child as long as they are aware of the situation. KDE is working with KSD, Eastern Kentucky University (EKU) and University of Louisville (UL) to ensure that interpreters are brought up to the level needed to obtain certification by 2003. The number of certified interpreters has increased from 31 in 1995 to 168 today, due to the efforts of such agencies as KCDHH. We must continue to build relationships with local school districts to ensure that the needs of every student, especially those in the mainstream school systems, are known to KDE.

A KSD staff person asked if the state is clear on what certification a teacher needs to work in Kentucky? Vivian Link responded that she believes the Board of Education is clear on what is required for certification. Qualifications for certification of high school teachers mandate an individual to be “content certified” as well as certified to specialize. That means the individual must be qualified in core content as well as the area they wish to specialize in, for example hearing impaired (HI). HI teachers must learn about communication modes, cultural aspects and reasons individuals become deaf or hard of hearing. This would not necessarily qualify someone to teach science; therefore Kentucky does hold more specific certification criteria for high school by mandating content certification. Middle school and elementary school certification is not as content specific. Nationwide, schools are beginning to look at this approach as a means of increasing student scores and the skills needed to succeed. Teachers are being encouraged to obtain dual certification in college to become more efficient teachers.

A KSD alumnus, parent and member of the KSD Advisory Board expressed concerns about several issues including teamwork in teaching and building trust with your team, for the benefit of the deaf children. He also questioned recent changes in classroom locations and asked that deaf instructors be given first priority when choosing classrooms, rather than outside entities. Mr. Johnson mentioned that some deaf staff as KSD are having problems with their TTY's being operational. He also mentioned that rumors were being spread that homework was no longer being assigned to deaf students. Although Mr. Johnson had a list of other concerns, his five-minute time limit expired. Vivian Link responded that if Mr. Johnson would provide her with a list of concerns she would address each of them to the best of her ability, and would consult with KDE if necessary for the response. As for today's questions, Ms. Link indicated that some of the concerns with property had been addressed earlier. However, she emphasized that KSD was given priority on location of classrooms, although not every individual teacher's need could be met. The criteria for selection was based on the student needs and the amount of time it takes them to move from one location to another between classes. Only after those needs were met were outside entities, such as Boyle County High School, allowed to utilize facilities for classes. Ms. Link indicated that the interaction between

mainstream students and KSD students has been beneficial for all concerned. The Boyle County Community Education Program has also begun using some facilities that have not been utilized in the past. She reminded everyone that the needs of the total program must be considered when assigning available space. She also indicated that homework assignments have not stopped. The extended school system that was in operation last year had to be discontinued due to lack of funds, as directed by the state.

A *KSD alumnus* asked for one minute, although time has elapsed for the scheduled Q & A session, to respond to several concerns. First he asked how teachers skills are evaluated, as some of the new staff are certified but do not have the teaching skills to succeed with the students? Who evaluates them, deaf or hearing individuals? With the current budget cuts it seems that KSD will suffer and a domino effect will cause the deaf students to lose out. Rumor has it that all the budget cuts will eventually cause KSD to be closed. Vivian Link responded that KSD has not experienced program cuts as of yet. The projected budget cuts were for all agencies across the state, but have not yet taken effect. Yes, there is an evaluation system in place for all teachers across the state that is very well laid out. All teachers, regardless of whether they are deaf or hearing, must be evaluated using the same system.

A *KSD staff person* clarified that the Homework Center, which is held after school and in the dormitories, continues to help students with homework on a daily basis, nothing has changed. Additionally, Mr. Kulick asked to speak on transition into adult life and commended several staff on their hard work in the independent living program. Eight students are currently involved and KSD staff hopes to expand the program. Input is needed as to how to instill the desire to work in students. Some parents unfortunately encourage their deaf and hard of hearing children to draw SSI instead of pursuing a career.

Bobbie Beth Scoggins, of KCDHH concluded the meeting with a wrap up and sharing of some additional information. She explained how KDE, KCDHH and many other agencies working with the deaf and hard of hearing population are VERY committed to positive change. Ms. Scoggins reiterated how KDE and its leadership are very interested in new ideas, new strategic plans, and new approaches to learning as well as developing best practice models. She also reminded everyone that change is often difficult and seems long in coming to fruition, but IS HAPPENING in Kentucky. She said that there is a need to focus on how deaf and hard of hearing children are taught. She continued to say that they learn through rote memory and visual acuity and must have literacy skills to succeed. She encouraged everyone to remember to look at the big picture - deaf and hard of hearing children achieving equally by the year 2014! She encouraged individuals with more questions to bring them to Ms. Link to address. She said staffing and personnel issues

need to be handled internally by KSD. She asked that individuals trust the “process” and see what happens, and if it doesn’t work, then another process can be established.

Kevin Martin ended the meeting by thanking KCDHH for sponsoring today’s information sharing session, and KAD for providing the refreshments.